



The NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALIST

CAIRNS

Journal of

NORTH QUEENSLAND NATURALISTS CLUB

Box 991, P.O. CAIRNS, Q. 4870. Australia.

Phone 53 1183

Founder President: The late **Dr. AR GO-FLECKER**

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OBJECTS: The furtherance of the study of the various branches of Natural History and the preservation of our heritage of indigenous fauna and flora

MEETINGS: Second Tuesday of each month at Cairns Education Centre, Cnr. Morehead and Lazarus Sts., Bungalow, 8.00 p.m.

FIELDS DAYS: Sunday before meeting. Notice of place and time given in "Cairns Post"

SUBSCRIPTIONS: (Due September 30th)
City and Suburban Members
Country Members
Pensioner and Junior Members

\$5.00
\$4.50
\$1.50

CLUB OFFICERS:
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Each author is responsible for the facts and opinions expressed
in his or her article.

FIFTY YEARS IS A LONG TIME !

by Dora Stokes

The following is an excerpt from the December 1932 issue of the "North Queensland Naturalist", journal of the North Queensland Naturalists Club which this year celebrates its Golden Anniversary:

"CURRENT SUBJECTS

The Club has taken up with the City Council the question of the establishment of a MUSEUM for Cairns. In a city of the importance of Cairns and the centre of the winter tourist traffic in Australia, and with such scope with the Barrier Reef so adjacent and the numerous varieties of local tropical interest etc., there is every reason why a museum should be established and it should be capable of being one of the best in the State. A conference between the Club and City Council has been set down for the 14th instant."

Following the February meeting of the N.Q.N.C. this year, the first meeting of its Golden Jubilee year (1932-1982), there were two links in the chain that history and natural history are making.

Link No.1: The Palmer River Historical and Preservation Society was founded in the presence of the Mayor of Cairns. The efforts of John Hay and his band of modern day explorers have at last forged a link in the chain. This brings to fulfilment the aims and hopes that Dr. Hugo Flecker and the founder members had for Cairns when the Naturalists Club was first formed. Our old journals record again and again that museum should be established and the history of North Queensland be recorded and preserved.

John Hay reported in his article 'Into the Lion's Den' in the publication 'Two Wheels' of May 1973, "Several items of historical value were gathered for a local museum in some of the most historical regions of Australia." This was when he was one of the twelve trail bike riders who set out from the Lion's Den at Helenvale to explore the Big Tableland. In 'Two Wheels' of April 1976 he records how he and fellow explorers surveyed from an aircraft the track to the summit of Mt. Mulligan plateau. They also had a good look over the Palmer River area ready for a future exploration of the Palmer. Later they made it to the top of Mt. Mulligan on their trail bikes and were photographed on the wall of the dam on the spur. John's article, 'Beyond the Shadow of Superstition Mountain' records their tremendous effort.

Link No.2: This link was firmly achieved when the School of Arts building was given over completely to form a museum to display the valuable collections of the Cairns Historical Society which also includes a case of medallions owned by the N.Q.N.C. Mr. Ernie Stephens, patron and former president of our Club, and also its members, past and present, have interests in the Historical Society and give their support to the history around us.

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THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Author Unknown.

Thou shalt inherit the holy earth as a faithful steward, conserving its resources and productivity from generation to generation.

Thou shalt protect thy fields from soil erosion and thy hills from over-grazing by thy herds so that thy descendants may have abundance for ever.

If any shall fail in his stewardship of the land, his fertile fields shall become sterile stones and gullies and his descendants shall decrease and live in poverty or vanish from the face of the earth.

--oOo--

FEBRUARY ACTIVITIES OF THE N.Q.N.C.

We thought you might find this account of a normal month's Club activities of interest. This is the account of February's field day and monthly meeting as published in 'The Cairns Post' of 12-2-'82 Club Notes.

"Early morning showers did not deter a small party of members of the North Queensland Naturalists Club from visiting two creeks along Tinaroo Creek Road on Sunday February 7th. A fine sunny day followed.

The area was picturesque after recent rain and the following wildflowers were observed: Dianella, Salanum, Wandering Jew (*Commelina cynea*) which are all blue; orange Spadeflower (*Hybanthus enneaspermum*), Meadow Dye (*Indigofera pratensis*), a small shrub with pinnate leaves and spikes of lavender flowers, white *Helichrysum*, the creeper *Hibbertia scandens*, its yellow flowers past and showing pale green seed pods.

Large trees along the creek were melaleucas, casuarinas, eucalypts, Leichhardt trees, *Tristania exiliflora* and *T. conferta*. The ground beneath the Cocky Apple trees (*Planchonia careya*) was littered with fallen fruit from which the seeds had been eaten by some creature. Grass trees (*Xanthorrhoea*) were all showing new growth after last year's fires.

With the damp weather fungi were abundant and some brightly coloured specimens were observed. One brilliant white one was like a newly emerged egg.

A great variety of butterflies were seen hovering along the creek and adjacent grassy areas including Common Egg Fly, Wanderer, Blue Triangle, Lesser Wanderer, Chalk White, Ulysses and Small Grass Yellow. Insects noticed were Damselfly and Dragonflies, Katydid, Leafhoppers and a large day-flying moth *Alcides Zodiaca*. A fierce Tiger Fly was seen on a tree, an insect which, as its name suggests, preys on other insects.

Not many birds were listed but among those were White Throated, Yellow Faced and Blue Faced Honeyeaters, Pale Headed Rosellas, a pair of Scaly Breasted Lorikeets nesting in a hole high in a eucalypt, Grey Thrush, Red Backed Quail, two Red Tailed Black Cockatoos slowly winging their way over the hills, Cicada Bird (nesting), a small flock of Spotted Pardalotes and a brilliant Scarlet Honey-eater feeding on the cream blossoms of the Blue Quandong (*Elaeocarpus grandis*).

The highlight of the monthly meeting held at the Education Centre was a talk by Mr. David Thomae on "observation Techniques of Rainforest Wildlife". Mr. Thomae said the rainforest is a friendly, exciting place and he can go to the one patch of forest a hundred times and still find something different. In his work with school children he teaches them to look, listen, touch and smell. By being led blindfolded to a tree, it is possible to learn much by touch and feel which one would not otherwise notice. Mr. Thomae illustrated his talk with some excellent slides and with recordings of bird calls. On a blackboard, he showed his system of "sketching" bird calls.

Mr. Les Francis exhibited a Free-tail Bat which is a small native. These bats sometimes live in colonies of hundreds and in houses they can cause damage to timber through large accumulations of guano which breeds fungi. Their normal call is too high a frequency for humans to hear. They are insect eaters.

On the exhibit table was a collection of fungi, fruit of *Planchonia careya* and other berries, a flowering Shepherd's Crook Orchid (*Geodorum pictum*) and branchlets of Mullock Wood and Iron Mullock Wood.

Mr. Francis showed a large drawing of a Dragon Fly and gave a brief talk on the insect.

The next field day will be to a national park near Malanda when some members plan to camp on Saturday night, others leaving Cairns at the usual time, 7.30 am on Sunday morning.

SOME FEEDING HABITS OF MARINE MOLLUSCS IN AN AQUARIUM

by Barbara Collins.

Molluscs and other Marine Invertebrates may not always perform the usual feeding processes in an aquarium. Often important dietary products are not always available so the animal will compensate for these deficiencies by accepting other foodstuffs not normally eaten.

To feed a spiny Sea Urchin we would bring home algal covered rocks, apparently with insufficient regularity. Our urchin was seen one evening feeding on a piece of prawn. Subsequently we observed it feeding on dead or dying *Hydatina physis* (bubble shell) and *Cypraea pyrifomis*. All urchins suffered an initial "drop of spines" and broken tips which eventually regrew after assimilation into the new environment. After a few months and apparently with this dietary deficiency, spines would again drop causing the urchin to lose protection and attacks by predatory fish and Hermit crabs would finish them.

The textile cones are about the most notorious for devastation of molluscan life in the aquarium and they have even pursued *Nassarius dorsatus* to the top of the tank to make sure of their prey.

The baler (*Melo amphora*) was the most difficult to keep. We had to provide food regularly at an alarming rate and it was necessary to keep some 'on ice' for him as often weather and tides did not suit the collection of live shell. He once ate a frozen *Amoria maculata* (Volute shell) but we found he was partial to frozen *Strombus* of the larger species and *Lambis lambis*. He always left the operculum deposited neatly within the aperture of the shell and once I accidentally fed him strombs that had been relaxed with Epsom Salts (Magnesium sulphate). He suffered no obvious ill effects from this misadventure. The baler's most unusual diet was *Murex brunneus*; he acquired a real taste for these armour plated shells and would climb the aquarium wall to lever them off. I was very surprised to see him devour the large Textile cone, though I feel this attack was purely territorial rather than predatory. There was ample other food available at the time. He regularly fed on other species of cone, *virgo* and most of the small varieties like *parvulus*, but he never bothered the large *Conus litteratus*.

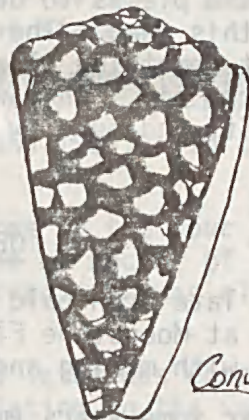
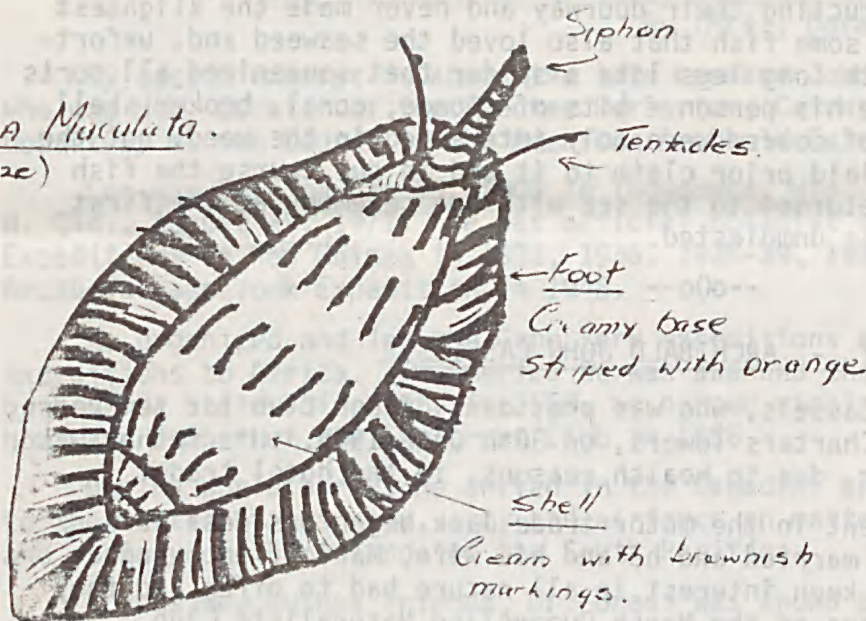
It was a surprise to us to witness the *Conus marmoreus* attack and kill a *Conus pulicarius* and *Olive tessellata* and an even greater surprise to see it feeding on a *Conus ammiralis*.

The funniest observation was the *Oliva elegans* that took on one of the frozen *Strombus aratum* - almost four times its own size ... it tried and tried but could only envelop about half the stromb. Eventually it gave up. These olives are usually scavengers but one emerged and pursued a live *Nassarius dorsatus* which tried vainly to escape by kicking and somersaulting. It was overtaken, enveloped and dragged beneath the sand, still kicking within the Olive's membrane.

It was fascinating to watch the large *Nassarius glans* feeding; we had him several months before a *C. textile* made short work of him. Chopped prawn or fish brought an instant reaction, with sand erupting all over the place with molluscs seeking food. Once the *Nassarius* and an *Oliva* found the same piece of fish and a fight ensued, the *Nassarius* almost getting enveloped by the olive. Fortunately it recoiled in time but lost its fish. There was more about so it set to, covering the food and tearing at it much as a dog would a bone. Another time the Hermit (*Pagurus*) latched onto the same piece claimed by the *Nassarius* and a real tug-of-war was on. The *Nassarius* dug in and held on, the crab, clutching the morsel in one nipper and trying to scrape the *Nassarius* off with the other. The *Nassarius* decided its adversary was too powerful and relinquished its hold and somersaulted away.

The pistol shrimps used to go berserk whenever I added some seaweed to the tank. What they did with it I'll never know. They would cart nipperfuls off to their burrow and have a marvellous time sorting through it. They shared their burrow with a colourful File shell (*Lima*) and it was quite mobile, moving all

MORIA Maculata.
(Not size)



Conus marmoreus

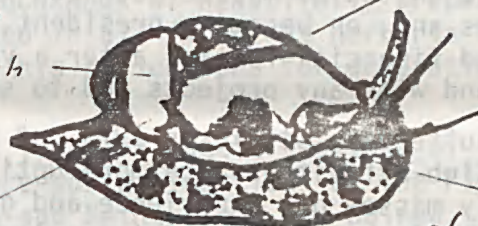
Velo umbilicatus : Juvenile
from egg case



Conus pulicarius

Protoconch

2 spines



first growth line.

Reproduction
of original colour
pattern.

Size 1" - Rate of growth
achieved in 11 months

Strombus
labiatus
(Not size)



Operculum

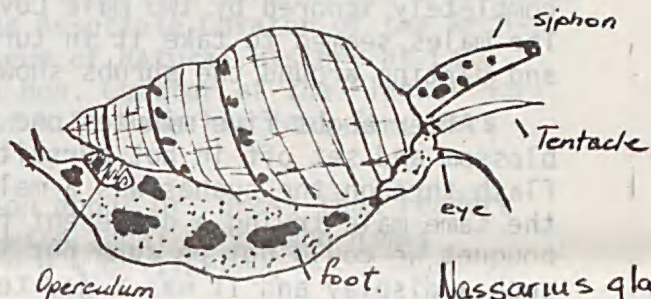


Strombus
aratum
(Not size)

Proboscis

Muscular
Foot

Bright
orange
aperture



Nassarius gladius



Oliva elegans.

about the burrow and hanging by its foot from the ceiling. The shrimps would simply move it if it was obstructing their doorway and never made the slightest attempt to molest it. We had some fish that also loved the seaweed and, unfortunately, a camouflage crab with long legs like a spider that souvenired all sorts of bits and pieces to decorate his person - bits of sponge, coral, broken shell and ... this weed. The fish of course were only interested in the weed, not the fact that something else had laid prior claim to it and in due course the fish dismembered him. They were returned to the sea with due ceremony at the first opportunity and our new crab is unmolested.

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OBITUARY - ARCHIBALD JOHN CASSELS

The late Archibald John Cassels, who was president of our Club for ten years, was born at Moonstone Flats, Charters Towers, on 30th June 1908. His father was involved with mining and later, due to health reasons, in the hotel trade.

After some years employment in the motor trade Jack began business as a spray painter. Soon after he married and he and his wife, Marion, encouraged their five children to take a keen interest in all nature had to offer and they soon became enthusiastic members of the North Queensland Naturalists Club. Jack and Marion's particular interest became bird watching. Marion was secretary for many years and they made a grand team.

While on the Committee Jack was fully involved in all aspects of the Club's activities and, on becoming president, was instrumental in getting the Club back on a sound financial footing after a very low period. He was always ready to lend a hand with any projects and to show visitors our northern flora and fauna.

He suffered a stroke in 1979 but nevertheless recovered sufficiently to take part in Club activities once more until he died suddenly on November 5th. Our Club sadly misses his experience and guidance but his family and Club members owe much to Jack for encouraging a love of our natural heritage.

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COURTSHIP OF LOVELY WRENS

by Dawn Magarry

The place - our garden; the time - a Saturday afternoon in July '81; and six excited humans, five with binoculars, one with a camera, and all being completely ignored by two male Lovely Wrens intent on courting a single female. The males seemed to take it in turns to pursue the lady with much twittering and darting around the shrubs showing flashes of blue and red, black and white.

After about five minutes one male savagely pecked off a yellow Tecoma blossom and set off in hot pursuit. Apparently this did not appeal so next flash through the bushes was a male with a red Pentas floret. Whether it was the same male trying a different flower or each suitor thinking he had the best bouquet we could not be sure but it was the first time any of us had witnessed such a display and it was a joy to watch.

* * * * *

Further to my notes on the Lovely Wrens, our regular pair ceased to visit our garden early in September. On September 22nd I heard their familiar high reeling calls and there they were with three fully fledged babies - all looking like dull versions of their mother.

Mum and Dad led them round the garden mid great twittering and begging for food. On the third day back Dad finally coaxed them into the bird bath. They were very hesitant at first but soon were jostling and shoving each other on the edge just like children and, just as with humans, once in the water they wouldn't come out. Finally a Dusky Honeyeater arrived which frightened them and away they all fled after their parents. Each day since they have returned for their daily dip.

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EXERPTS FROM THE N.Q.N.C. LIBRARY - DR. BRASS

by (Mrs.) Dora Stokes, Hon. Librarian.

My second excerpt is about the late Leonard John Brass, botanist and explorer who was Hon. Curator of the Flecker Herbarium, Cairns, 1966 - 1971. A paper from Hobart by M. van Deusen of the American Archbold Expeditions states:-

Len was born on May 29, 1900 in Toowoomba, Wld. Australia and died in Cairns, N. Qld., August 29, 1971. He was official botanist on the American Archbold Expeditions to New Guinea in 1933, 1936, 1938-39, 1956-57 and 1959; also to the Archbold Cape York Expedition in 1948.

He organized and led the Cape York expeditions and three of the four post-war expeditions to Africa. In America he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science by Florida State University in 1962, an honour richly deserved. He was elected an honorary member of the Explorers Club in 1956.

During World War 2, he served in the Canadian army and later was consultant to the United States navy, army and airforce on matters relating to the vegetation and ecology of the islands of the South Pacific.

To his New Guinea friends, Dr. Brass was known as the 'Nambawan masta' or 'Big taubada'.

A protege of the famous C.T. White, botanist at the Queensland Herbarium at Brisbane, Len was considered the finest field botanist and collector in the history of Australian botany. His tens of thousands of beautifully prepared and documented specimens are admired and cherished in all important herbaria of the World. Plant taxonomists will be working on his collections for generations to come.

Len would reminisce for hours about his years on cattle stations of the Gulf Country, the Solomon Islands, his exciting pre-war explorations of the Fly River Basin and the Saw-toothed Mountains of Papua and Netherlands New Guinea. He had a particular fondness for the practically uninhabited Cape York Peninsula.

He began planning the 1948 Archbold Cape York Expedition as soon as World War 2 ended. This trip resulted in collections which were of major importance to the biological understanding of the role of the Peninsula as a land bridge between Queensland and New Guinea for the dispersal of flora and fauna during prehistoric epochs.

The friendships made on these trips played an important part in Len's decision to live in Cairns after retiring from his post as Associate Curator of the Archbold Collections. (This was at the American Museum of Natural History at Lake Placid, Florida, U.S.A.). His post in Cairns as Hon. Curator of the Flecker Herbarium gave Len satisfaction and his 'cobbers' of N.Q. made his last few years warm and full.

NOTE: The Librarian would welcome any information about Dr. Brass that readers may have, especially his botanical work, with local or common names appended, so that it may be added to the N.Q.N.C. library.

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A RED KOOKABURRA

by Dawn Magarry.

This kookaburra, whose normally white parts were a bright rufous colour, was sighted on 27th December last year in company with two others, one with normal white and the other rufous tinged. We do not think it was caused by bathing or a dust bath in red soil as the colour was too even. The rufous one was not popular with the local drongoes who chased it on sight.

The three birds were seen regularly for over a month. The tinged one became almost white but the other bird still had its rufous colour.

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BIRDING TRIP TO IRON RANGE

by John Crowhurst.

A group of 'birder's' from the Bird Observers Club, Melbourne, had planned a trip to Iron Range, roughly 250 km south of the tip of Cape York, from 15th to 29th August 1981 and, due to a cancellation, I was able to go. The base camp was on the Middle Claudie River. Camping facilities and meals were both good. I spotted 18 new species of birds, missed three species and was too early for two which would arrive later in the year.

On the second day I saw two Palm Cockatoos fly over but it was only on the Friday before leaving that I actually saw them perching. Before that I was frustrated each time by hearing them call, trying to stalk them, only to see them fly off. This Friday it happened again but they only flew a little way into the jungle with a group of us following. Suddenly in a window in the foliage, there they were, two huge slaty grey birds with great crests. One danced, bowing and raising its wings, swaying from side to side, almost turning upside down.

Also seen were dark colourless birds. One afternoon, late, two of them came low. The first green and red, the second blue and crimson, a pair of Eclectus Parrots! For some time none of us could find them perching, then we found the "eclectus tree", a huge fig. The first view was of a red head sticking out of a hole half way up, then the flash of crimson and blue as the female left. At one time we saw three males and two females. They were competing for nesting sites with two Sulphur Crested Cockatoos. This tree was overloaded with a colony of clamorous Metallic Starlings. On a bare bough there was a nest of a Grey Goshawk which I saw a couple of times.

We saw other small parrots, their alarm calls resembling Noisy Miners. On the third day one landed on a bare bough, a male Red Cheeked Parrot. Frequently we found family parties foraging. On a track in deep jungle, I heard a call which I thought was a Scrub Robin. I mimicked it. It answered and kept on. When it was close I looked up and there, peering down, was a female Red Cheeked Parrot. When she flew, a second, a male that I hadn't even seen, flew from just below her.

The final parrot was the northern sub-species of the Fig Parrot. They were easy to find; the whole party had good views of them. Small parrots, they clambered along the boughs of fruiting trees. If you didn't watch carefully they quietly disappeared amongst the leaves. I often heard them flying through the camp.

There were two popular trees near camp. We called one the fig tree where, on the fourth day, some of us spent the afternoon. The first birds there were a flock of Yellow Fig Birds, then a group of Barred Cuckoo Shrikes. Two Yellow Orioles appeared followed by two Fig Parrots, then came a male Magnificent Rifle Bird. He hopped round attacking the bark with strong curved bill and picked figs with relish; two females came later. Another first for me were two Frill Necked Flycatchers flitting around the trunk and branches, hanging upside down, acting like treecreepers. Down by the stream a White Faced Robin bathed, water erupting in all directions. Later we saw plenty of them. A pair of Yellow Breasted Boatbills, a Spectacled Monarch and lastly, another new bird, the Broad Billed Flycatcher flying around the bushes opposite.

The other tree we called the pigeon tree. On the last morning it gave a glorious display. Five Wompoo Pigeons were feeding, flapping vigorously to keep their balance on the slender bending branches. Higher were the much harder to see Purple Crowned and Red Crowned Fruit Pigeons. Two Manucodes flew in, their calls resembling toy trumpets. They fed a while and left. I saw one displaying. It stiffened its tail, raised both wings high and forward over its head, bent forward and raised its crest. It held this pose for a few seconds, each time uttering a throaty trumpet call. It did this display five times. The last bird this Saturday morning was a Little Kingfisher. It dived twice, perched silently, then flashed round a bend.

The whole group worked hard for the Yellow Billed Kingfisher. Their trilling was heard every morning. If one was disturbed it froze. Since it is small and the underbrush has lots of yellow leaves it was more often heard than seen. All the sightings were by chance. We just came across them while looking for something else. A woman in the group I was with was looking for a Spectacled Monarch when suddenly she saw this female kingfisher. We stared at it, it looked at us, quite still. It flew four times and each time we found it. The last time we had a good view in the open. This was the only one I saw.

I had luck with the Northern Scrub Robin. Each morning I heard calls resembling Fern Wrens. A few days later it dawned on me what they were. So one afternoon I went along to where I'd heard these calls and waited. I went in at 2 p.m. and when 4 p.m. came I was just going when I heard a rustling of leaves, then a head poked over a rise a few feet away. I froze and for the next hour watched these birds feeding, preening, jumping up at leaves to pick off insects. They became still when people passed on the track a few feet away. When a truck lurched by they flew off. Only four others got these birds and those had only glimpses.

Down the main road was the old camp where a few years earlier another birding group had camped. Here I got the Green Backed Honeyeater, a secretive nondescript bird like a Silvereye. These birds are only found in the Claudie River district, in groups of two or three with other insectivorous birds, and keep to the middle and upper storeys of the jungle. Another new bird was the Yellow Footed Flycatcher that I got in the jungle and along the main road. The Little Bronze Cuckoo and the Chestnut Breasted Cuckoo were other firsts. In a flowering Bombax tree were Tawny Breasted Honeyeaters which became very common. There were excellent views of Shining Flycatchers and Jungle Fowl were common. We had a Noisy Pitta bobbing along the track and another that stood flicking its wings for at least five minutes calmly looking us over.

The other new birds were Tropical Scrub Wrens and a Fawn Breasted Bowerbird at Portland Roads, an isolated settlement on the coast.

I saw pitcher plants, sundews and antplants at Mt. Tozer, a green-blue python on the West Claudie, a huge amethystine python up a tree being chivvied by small birds, a Children's Python frightening everybody when it came down the tree it was in, a pair of Owlet Nightjars above the tent next to mine, a cuscus seen by spotlight, a view of a Brush Tailed Possum scuttling up a tree, a Barn Owl along the main road, a display of fireflies at Bishops Camp, a large water monitor that used our swimming hole or basked on the bank opposite our meal tent, a dingo walking down a jungle path, a camp of Spectacled Flying Foxes, a green tree snake crossing the road, hundreds of Brolgas and Sarus Cranes patrolling the beach at the mouth of the Lockhardt River, a wallaby that almost knocked me down, a female Magnificent Rifle Bird on a nest, a pair of Crested Hawks towards the West Claudie, and the early dawn flights of bats still feeding on insects.

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AN UNUSUAL SIGHTING

by Dawn Magarry.

On 23rd January 1982 I took a Victorian visitor out to the mangrove creeks at Edmonton to look for Mangrove Robins. While walking along our usual track we heard the call of a Black Faced Monarch. We found the bird feeding about five metres up in a tree in the scrub along the creek and were surprised to see a bird exactly like a Black Faced Monarch except that it had black and grey wings and a black tail. Although it was well south of its range the bird was identified as a Black Winged Monarch. We watched it for some ten minutes until the fierce mosquitoes chased us away.

J.D. McDonald in 'Birds of Australia' quotes it as sometimes coming as far south as the Atherton Tablelands and a local 'birdo' friend recorded it some years ago at Mossman.

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IN THE MANGROVE SWAMP

by Sybil Kimmins.

There is sickness and death in the mangrove swamps
In bygone days was said,
And away from its tempting mystic depths
The children were firmly led.

But ignorance thrived in the bygone days;
Much was misunderstood.
The mangroves, indeed, were a breeding ground
Not for illness, but for food.

I found beauty and life in the mangrove swamp;
A city of crab and prawn;
And myriad forms of life were found
In sheltered pools where fish could spawn.

A lyrical voice so tantalizing
Called from the mangrove trees
And I was irresistably drawn
By the sougning South Sea breeze.

So I forced a path through the barrier grass
That moaned a protest dirge
And endeavoured to lance this intruder's legs -
But strong the explorer's urge!

Just a fleeting glimpse was afforded me
Of hitherto unseen
Fiery brilliance and startling white, deep
In the labyrinth of green.

A magnificent bird that I had not seen
Before that exciting day
Delighted my eyes for a moment brief
Then it swiftly flew away.

Pneumatophores like suppliant arms
Reached up from the mud to draw
In needed air for the mangrove trees
Continually needing more,

Far more than the salt-soaked ooze could give,
So nature devised a means
For the trees to derive their nutrients;
Unorthodox, it seems.

I found beauty and life in the mangrove swamp;
Honeyed blossoms of red and white,
Unknown singing birds, pistol prawns and crabs,
Plump fish when the tide was right!

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